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FM AMEMBASSY BELMOPAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1576
RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS BELMOPAN 000517

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

WHA/CEN (ROIS BEAL AND DAVID WOLFE)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [GT](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: BELIZEANS REACT STRONGLY TO THE SIGNING OF THE ICJ
COMPROMIS

¶1. (SBU) FM Wilfred Elrington returned home to a barrage of questions from the local press after the signing of the compromis in Washington, DC on Monday December 8, 2008. He and Belize's lead negotiator, Ambassador Fred Martinez, held a press conference immediately upon their return. Elrington unfortunately ratcheted up the rhetoric by implying that if the referendum did not pass, the Guatemalans might resort to force. He was quoted saying the choice is the ICJ or taking up arms and defending the border. At the same time, he also chastised the media, claiming they are being "hysterical". In a separate but related incident, Martinez was pelted by eggs after leaving a morning radio show where he discussed the compromis.

¶2. (SBU) The Belizean media and citizens have responded critically over the past week to Elrington's statements and the topic has dominated the airwaves. Elrington has been criticized for placing his negotiators in the position of having to defend the compromis as opposed to sensitizing the public on the matter. Several public fora were held this week and reports indicate most people were unsupportive of the compromis and believe no Belizean land should be ceded to Guatemala.

¶3. (SBU) Comment. Either poor preparation or a lack of media sensitivity led Minister Elrington to be careless with his remarks earlier this week. The ICJ issue is a visceral issue to most Belizeans and needed to be handled more carefully than what was demonstrated this week. The public fora already have a very negative tone to their discussions and have focused thus far on what happens if the referendum in Belize does not pass. The GOB will have a lot of catching up to do when it comes time to sell the voters on the benefits to Belize to passing the referendum and taking the border issue to the ICJ. End comment.

DIETER